



The Planning Process

"The comprehensive planning process has given stakeholders an important role in informing OSEP on how IDEA Part D national activities can help improve results for children with disabilities."

Lou Danielson, Ph.D.
Director of OSEP's Division of
Research to Practice

In 1999, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) launched a long-range, comprehensive planning process for Part D of the reauthorized 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. OSEP's goal for its Part D national program is to link best practices to states, school systems, and families to improve results for infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities. Part D of IDEA '97 authorizes national program activities and federal funding for:

- Research and innovation.
- Personnel preparation.
- Technical assistance and dissemination.
- Parent training and information.
- Technology.
- Media services.
- Studies and evaluation.

OSEP undertook a significant initiative in implementing the Part D national program comprehensive planning process. Among the activities undertaken were:

- Solicit opinions about the Part D national program through mass distribution of an opinion survey in both web-based and printed formats to obtain a general listing of preferences.
- Convene experts to identify issues in key program areas and make recommendations for how the Part D national program may address them.
- Use recommendations from the opinion survey, panels, and other national and state sources to develop a five-year Part D national program plan.

Nationwide Outreach Effort Informs Program Directions

OSEP has a long history of involving stakeholders in its national programs and continually looks for new ways to guarantee that their opinions inform its planning efforts. Thus it is no surprise that OSEP began its Part D planning process by seeking the involvement of the broader education community—especially individuals with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities, professionals in the fields of general and special education, members of national organizations, and representatives of various levels of government—to share their needs and issues related to improving results for students with disabilities.

Outreach began on May 14, 1999, when representatives from more than 40 national organizations whose members are drawn from the key Part D consumer groups joined

IDEA Part D National Program



OSEP in generating survey items and planning strategies for soliciting opinions from their constituents on how best to improve results for children with disabilities and their families. Information from this meeting was used to develop opinion surveys, that were prepared in both written and web-based formats, as well as made available in Spanish. Drafts were reviewed extensively by constituent groups for content and readability. The national organizations helped distribute information about the survey through membership and internal channels. Advertisements were placed in major educational periodicals and newspapers, and press packets were sent to the media, educational projects, and parent centers.

The outreach effort enabled OSEP to reach out to thousands of individuals who were interested in education across the country. More than 14,900 consumers—defined as individuals with disabilities and their families, teachers, administrators, and others employed to work with children with disabilities and their families—completed the opinion survey between April and September 2000.

Panels Convened to Explore Key Issues

Nationally recognized consumer, research, training, and technical assistance authorities were invited to share their opinions regarding the key issues associated with consumers' priorities and how the Part D national program might respond. Key issues—which also reflect major provisions in the 1997 reauthorized IDEA—were grouped into five broad planning areas:

- Students with disabilities' access to, participation and progress in the general education curriculum.
- Standards-based reform and stu-

dents with disabilities.

- Positive behavioral intervention, social/emotional, and life skills supports and services for students with disabilities.
- Improving results in early childhood for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities and their families.
- Students with disabilities' secondary education, transition, and employment.

"Our goal in involving the broader education community at the planning stage is to ensure that the plan reflects consumers' issues and needs, extends the knowledge base, and improves the translation of research findings to practice. We also want the plan to build on OSEP's current national program investments."

Renée Bradley, Ph.D.
Special Assistant to the Director
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Authorities in each planning area defined key issues that influence progress in the area, identified barriers, and suggested possible strategies that OSEP might incorporate into the IDEA Part D national program plan to bridge the identified gaps.

Next Steps

The results of the opinion survey and panel findings, along with other relevant planning information—such as the findings of Parts B and C monitoring and oversight efforts and State Improvement Grant Program proposals, as required under Part

D, Subpart 2 of IDEA—are being integrated by agency-wide staff workgroups into a comprehensive Part D national program plan. Once analyses are complete, the agency will map long-term research-to-practice strategies in each of the five broad Part D planning areas. OSEP intends to select strategies that:

- Take advantage of the agency's current activities relevant to consumers' opinions and the key issues associated with responding to consumers' needs.
- Have the greatest potential to contribute to improved results for children with disabilities in the next decade.
- Optimally combine several types of Part D activities in research, knowledge production, capacity building, and public awareness and support.
- Leverage OSEP's involvement to bring about more attention to the issue by other Federal, state, local, and private agencies and organizations.

The public will be invited to comment on the Part D national program plan before it is presented to Congress for approval. ■

**The comprehensive planning process is authorized by IDEA [sec. 661(1)].*

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